

Will Allow Veterans Facilities to Compete for More Medical Providers with Student Loan Repayment

Washington, DC - Congressman Bruce Braley (D-Iowa) announced today he plans to introduce legislation expanding access to veterans care by allowing the Veterans Administration to recruit more qualified mental health providers, doctors, nurses and dentists to America's rural communities. The *Veterans Access to Care Act* will classify Veterans Administration facilities and state Veterans Homes as Health Professional Shortage Areas, allowing them to compete for National Health Service Corps fellows, creating more incentive for high-performing medical students to serve America's veterans. Braley spoke at the VFW in Davenport today.

"In my office there is no higher priority than helping veterans and military families receive the compensation, benefits, and other services they have earned," Braley said. "The VA is facing an increased and unprecedented demand for medical services today as aging World War II, Korean War and Vietnam War

veterans require more medical care and thousands of veterans are returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan with serious physical and mental health needs.

"The *Veterans Access to Care Act* will allow the VA to recruit more qualified mental health professionals, doctors, dentists and nurses to treat our nation's veterans by competing for National Health Service Corps funding and ensuring our veterans have access to the care they have not only earned, but also the high-quality care they deserve."

The National Health Services Corps (NHSC) is administered through the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) at the Department of Health and Human Services. Health Professional Shortage Areas are designated by HHS as having shortages of primary medical care, dental or mental health providers and may be geographic (a county or service area), demographic (low income population) or institutional (federally qualified health centers or certain other public facilities).

By designating VA facilities and state Veterans Homes as Health Professional Shortage Areas, it allows these sites to compete for National Health Service Corps fellows, which is a program that pays student loan repayment to doctors, dentists, and mental health professionals who pledge to practice in a HPSA for at least two years. Under the *Veterans Access to Care Act*, a VA facility must show the need for more medical professionals and competes based on need with the other eligible sites, such as Community Health Clinics and prisons. If America's veterans aren't getting the care they need, they deserve the chance to show their need and be treated.